[Windmill Orchard]

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LIFE HISTORY

TITLE: WINDMILL ORCHARD (Revise of [He And The Old Woman?])

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Name of Person Interviewed Emanual Schumpert (white)

Fictitious Name Ed Leightsey

Post Office Address West Columbia, S. C.

County Lexington

Occupation Farmer & M'kt. Gardener

Name of Writer John L. Dove

Name of Revisor State Office

During the week before Christmas, 1936, the Columbia, S. C., curb market was thronged with shoppers who were making choice selections from the limitless assortment of poultry, fresh vegetables, fruits and other things for holiday tables. Under a sign marked Windmill Orchard stood Ed Leightsey, proprietor of that stall, a stocky old gentleman of average height, with thin gray hair. A smile lighted his wrinkled sun-tanned face; not just a business-getting smile but one that expressed the warmth of human kindness. People

stopping at his stall, or even looking his way, were greeted with that smile and his best wishes for their holiday seasons.

“Mr. Leightsey, the Market Master has just told me of the great success C10- 1/21/41 - S.C.

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you've made of your business on this market and said, 'See old Ed Leightsey if you want a good story of a good man and a good farmer.'”

“Oh, well,” he said, laughing good-naturedly, “I'll be glad to tell you what little there is to tell, but I don't think it will excite you much.”

He turned to his wife, a small brunette of around sixty years, who was listening to our conversation. “Minnie, where'd be the best place to start telling?”

“Just anywhere, but don't forget our school days and our trip to Charleston.”

While Ed, or “He,” as she generally calls him, was left to tell the story, Mrs. Leightsey served the wants of the numerous shoppers who stopped to price the neatly arranged piles of onions, cabbage, collards, turnips, potatoes, pecans, peanuts, flowers, eggs, and fruits. All of this, except the fruits, had been produced at Windmill Orchard, their farm in Lexington County. They also had for sale live chickens and turkeys that had been grown on their farm.

He, after nodding his head in the direction of Congaree River, began: “I was born just over the river a few miles in Lexington County on January 3, 1871. So you see I'm past my sixty-seventh birthday. I went through what they would call, I reckon, the seventh or eight grade at school. Anyway, I studied the old blue-back speller, the dictionary, Reed and Kellogg's grammar, history, arithmetic, through stocks and bonds, and the big geography that had the pictures of wild animals and big snakes living among the trees in the jungles.

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I quit school at twenty years of age to take a job with the Danville Lumber Company at Dixiana, South Carolina, at seventy-five cents a day and my board.

“Well, sir, Dixiana is one of the few places in the world where you can 3 be out of sight of land and water all at the same time. It's not far from where I was born, and I know every pig path in it. Like the callow youth I was, I took a notion that I could grow farm crops on that land. So after two years at the sawmill I quit my job and used my savings to buy a mule and a few farm tools. I pitched my tent early in 1894 on some cut-over land in that God-forsaken sandhill community and started/ to farming. The land around Dixiana was, and still is, so poor that the only use we Lexingtonians can find for it is a sort of space filler, or just so much poor sand put there to hold the world together. That's why I just said that Dixiana is one of the few places where you are out of sight of land and water all at the same time.

“Well, of course, I had no trouble in renting enough land at Dixiana for a one-horse farm. And I got down to work with a vim in the spring of 1894. Soon I had the land prepared and my crops planted. The seasons were very good that year, and my cotton and corn, my pumpkin and potatoes, and my other crops bloomed on that fresh sand. But as luck would have it, the bumblebees and caterpillars found those lowly blossoms and admired them so much that they charged upon them, wearing themselves, and the crops, out against the ground.”

“But Mr. Leightsey! I have always understood that bumblebees do no harm to crops. In fact, I have been taught that bumblebees are quite helpful to crops, in that they assist with pollination.”

“That's just it,” he agreed. “You see, we old-timers used to speak of the poor dwarfy cotton stalks which produced no more than one or two blossoms as bumblebee cotton. You know a bumblebee is a rather heavy insect, and, in our imagination, we could see the puny little cotton bend to the ground under the bee's weight.”

“Oh, yes, I get the meaning now. Won't you please go on with the story?”

“After my failure at Dixiana, my daddy, Jacob Leightsey, came to see me and persuaded me to return home near New Brockland, now known as West Columbia. I swallowed my pride, mounted my little mule, and returned, like the prodigal son, to the land of my father. At the beginning of 1895, I went to work as a one-horse sharecropper for my daddy. I slept in the back room of a little commissary store, and cooked and ate my scant rations in the same room for two years. I worked hard during those two years at growing corn, melons, potatoes, tomatoes, beans, turnips, and a little cotton. Luck was with me too, and I was able to produce a lot of stuff to sell in Columbia. After giving my daddy one-fourth of the receipts for rent, I had $800.00 saved at the beginning of 1897.

At this point in his narrative, the old gentleman paused for a moment as if he was trying to refresh his memory pertaining to some particular event in his younger days. He then said: “When 1897 came, I did a very wise thing - I bought, mainly on credit, twenty acres of my daddy's land and built thereon a four-room cottage. He paused again just long enough to walk around to the opposite side of the counter from where Mrs. Leightsey was standing. Squinting in the direction of “the old woman,” as he sometimes refers to her, he remarked, “I then did a foolish thing - I bought a buggy.” He winked an eye in the direction of the writer, and then “the old woman” turned her head in time to see Ed shaking his big left fist in her face, and to hear the following remark:

“In the fall of 1897, I married that old battle-axe standing over there, and then my troubles really began. I once thought she was pretty Minnie Berry. My! how she could always manage to find a seat by the side of me when we 5 were in school and sat on the slab benches placed around the fireplace in the old schoolhouse.”

He backed away just in time to prevent a lick from a threatening piece of packing case held by the belligerent appearing Minnie. All of this was, of course, a demonstration of good-humored badinage frequently exchanged between Ed and Minnie.

According to Minnie, who by this time had joined in the discussion, the years 1898 to 1908 were critical and eventful. While Ed continued to “pull the bell-cord over his mule,” Minnie cooked and “nursed Ed and the children.” He explained how he had developed his land to a high state of cultivation by a judicious combination of crop rotations, home-made fertilizer, and liberal plantings of cowpeas, vetches, and other lequmes.

“And just as fast as we could produce fruits and vegetables, eggs and chickens, and other things sufficient to pay the cost, ten dollars per acre, of one block of twenty acres of my daddy's farm, we obligated ourselves to buy an adjoining twenty acres of the old farm. I found, all the while, a ready market for our produce among the people living in the city across the Congaree River, six miles away.

“Yes, Minnie and I worked hard during those years, and luck was with us. Our acres increased rapidly, as did our family until we had eleven children. After ten years of work and 'penny-pinching,' we managed to save $1,350.00 from our earnings, which enabled us to buy my daddy's entire farm of 135 acres. During this time I did not buy a single bale of hay or bushel of corn with which to feed my mules and cows.

“After we had finished paying for the farm in 1908, Minnie and I agreed that the time had come for us to take our long delayed honeymoon vacation, the trip to Charleston she mentioned at the beginning of our conversation.”

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He took a deep breath of air, and said, “But, maybe I'd better let her tell about that, for I believe she got more out of the trip than I did.”

“You see, it's like this,” Mrs. Leightsey began. “Ed has never wanted much said about that Charleston trip. Well, I finally persuaded him that he needed to get away from the farm for a few days. So during the winter of 1908, he agreed that we would go to Charleston, and to Charleston we went. Everything went lovely until we reached the city by the sea; then trouble, as well as fun, began for me. Neither of us had before seen the seashore. When we looked out upon those rolling waves of water, I decided it would be nice for us to take a boat ride around the bay. I wanted to get a close view of Fort Sumter and other places we had read about. But when I told Ed of my desire, he bucked like a stubborn old mule and said: 'Why, Minnie, the very idea! I have always felt there was just as much water in Congaree River as I would care to undertake to pull you out of in case of an accident to you in crossing. I just can't risk your life out there in that pond.' So we didn't go.”

The short vacation over, Minnie and Ed returned home. The old ancestral farm and home had been paid for and was their property. Ed Leightsey and his better half went about making improvements. New barns were built for the livestock and poultry in accordance with plans furnished by the Clemson College Extension Division. Improved breeds of hogs, cows, and poultry were installed in place of the scrub and mixed breeds formerly kept. A new peach orchard, a grape vineyard, and a flower garden were planted. Later, the pastures were newly fenced and sodded to adapted clovers and grasses. And, finally, the old log residence was remodeled and painted, and a windmill, with which to pump water into the home and to the barn, was installed. Thus it 7 was the farm became known as Windmill Orchard.

It is said that Ed Leightsey never lets up in his search for ways and means of making improvements at Windmill Orchard. And his marketing methods are much superior to the average method on the curb market. His description of his production and marketing experience was as follows:

“When the time comes for me to be at home to look after the planting, cultivating, harvesting, and packing of my products, Mrs. Leightsey comes to the market and looks

after our interest here. I know about when my various crops planted will be ready for the market. I try not to have too much of any one crop ready for the market at one time. I make plantings throughout the year as the seasons permit. This curb system of selling home-raised produce fits into my scheme perfectly. It is a great improvement over the old street peddling system we once had in Columbia. When necessary, I can be at home looking after crop production, while Minnie does the selling.

“I sort (grade) every pound of my produce; then I put it up in even weight boxes or bags or baskets before offering it for sale. There are no little potatoes at the bottom of the basket and big potatoes at the top. They are all alike in size, color, and quality in the pack. I've been in this business long enough to know that I must give my customers what they want and that which they feel they have bought. When I once sell a customer, he stays sold. One satisfied customer, I know, makes other customers for my stand here. My gross sales from this curb stand amounts to around $3,000 a year. Come out to the farm and see things for yourself,” he insisted.

It was during the spring of 1937 that the writer had an opportunity to visit the Leightsey farm. Windmill Orchard was found, in truth, a well kept farm. It is located on a county road, six miles west of the Congaree River 8 bridge - the concrete span that separates the city of Columbia from the town of West Columbia - and continue the 135 acres which Ed and Minnie bought in the early years of their married life. Some of the land is on the streams, where there in the choicest of grazing for cattle, sheep, and hogs; other portions of the farm contain forests of the lordly long loaf pine; and others again are the well-cultivated fields, orchards, and vineyards. In close proximity to the modern livestock and poultry in an old well-preserved two-story residence, built of logs hewn from rich yellow pines - timber known through the ages for its ability to withstand the storms and ravages of time. There, too, a windmill slowly turned in the morning breeze at its task of raising and lowering the long pump shaft over the well.

In addition to the flock of purebred poultry cackling in the barnyard, the place was alive with the birds of the air, including the rat-a-tat-tat of a woodpecker, tearing at the bark of a nearby pine in machine-gun-like precision. The rattle of cow bells, the grunt of pigs, and the hum of bees were heard. The odor of violets and other spring flowers filled the air. Joy, too, was abroad in the land; for, in the mulberry tree near the pig lot, a number of happy greasy-faced pickaninnies were heard to yodle, 'hi-le-i-la-he-hoo.'

Ed Leightsey, progressive in his farm management methods and of a practical turn of mind, has no particular interest in legislation or politics. “Farm legislation can have but little meaning to me,” he said. “I have always lived and boarded at the same place.”

By that, he means that he produces his fruits and vegetables, bacon and hominy, milk and honey, and, in short, his entire living at Windmill Orchard.

Mr. Leightsey claims that he has crossed and re-crossed Congaree River 9 for forty-one years, with loads of produce for the Columbia Market. He now makes weekly, often semi-weekly, and sometimes daily deliveries of produce to this stand on the curb market. Long before the newsboys begin their chant, “Morning State,” on the streets of the city, Ed and Minnie drive up Gervais Street in their flivver, loaded to its gunwales with potatoes, turnips, chickens, melons, peaches, grapes, and other things in season - all ready for sale when the market opens at an early morning hour. “I never let the grass grow under my feet,” is one of Mr. Leightsey's ways of expressing his stirring habits. Ed, they say, never walks to his work; he runs.

“Mr. Leightsey, I understand you Dutch farmers of Lexington County have fed the people of Columbia since the War Between the States. In that correct?”

“You bet I have finished my share of the eats,” was his answer. He then explained how his ancestors, and the grandparents of other Lexington farmers, had been pushed back into the poorer sandhills by the old landed aristocracy in the early days of the State. With

the old smile, which seldom leaves his face, he concluded with the remark: “Well, I guess 'every dog has his day.' I'm having very good luck with my sales of produce among many of the descendants of those splendid old aristocrats.”

While Ed Leightsey says you can bet on his having helped feed the people of Columbia, you can bet your “bottom dollar”” with safety, that he has fed those eleven children of his at the fountainhead. Judging from the hale and hearty appearance of them, they must have been “buttermilk fed chickens.”

Yes, Ed Leightsey claims that he and Minnie have reared eleven children — six sons and five daughters — at Windmill Orchard, and that each has been given a high school education. “They are all married and gone now,” he said, 10 apparently with a feeling of regret. Ira is a building contractor; Vernon, a lumber dealer; John runs a garage; Arney is a textile worker; and Charles is a farmer. The girls are now Mesdames Stuckey, Williamson, Jeffcoat, Senn, and Sharp. “According to the last count, we have thirty-one grandchildren,” said Ed with an amused grin.

Even though the songs and ories of the Leightsey children are heard no more around the old home, Ed and Minnie have no desire to “let up” in their work of gardening and marketing. They continue to cross and re-cross Congaree River each day, except Sunday, on their way to and from their produce stand on the Columbia Curb Market. And there, under the sign Windmill Orchard, they carry on, side by side, as was their wont in their childhood days at the old backwoods school.”